

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 EB-08 COME-00 STR-04 AGRE-00 TRSE-00

MCT-01 ITC-01 /070 W

-----182231Z 123635 /66

P R 182030Z MAR 77

FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 539

INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

USSOUTHCOM

AMCONSUL CALI

AMCONSUL BARRANQUILLA

AMCONSUL MEDELLIN

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 BOGOTA 2597

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, ECON, CO

SUBJ: THE WEEK IN COLOMBIA

1. SUMMARY. THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY'S MOST ATTRACTIVE POTENTIAL PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE CONTINUED TO AVOID THE HONOR, WHILE EX-PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS OFFICIALLY ANNOUNCED HIS CANDIDACY FOR THE LIBERAL PARTY NOMINATION. PRESIDENT LOPEZ TRAVELLED TO COSTA RICA TO SIGN A MARITIME AGREEMENT. HIS JOURNEY WAS THE FIRST TEST OF A NEW PROCEDURE FOR DESIGNATING A TEMPORARY PRESIDENT. A U.S. CONGRESSIONAL VISIT COVERED TRADE ISSUES, WHILE THE GOC CALLED FOR VOLUNTARY RESTRAINTS BY COLOMBIAN FLOWER EXPORTERS. THE GOC APPROVED FOOD IMPORTS TO HOLD DOWN FOOD PRICES. THE CAPTURE OF AN ELN CELL CLEARED UP THE MYSTERY SURROUNDING THE 1975 MURDER OF GENERAL RINCON, BUT KIDNAPPINGS, GANG WAREFARE AND PIRATES PLAGUE NATION'S PUBLIC ORDER.END SUMMARY.

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2. CANDADICIES: BETANCUR DECLINES AGAIN-LLERAS MAKES IT OFFICIAL. WITH ALMOST A YEAR TO GO UNTIL THE PARTY NOMINATING CONVENTIONS, MANEUVERING FOR THE LIBERAL AND CONSERVATIVE PARTY PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACIES CONTINUED. ALVARO GOMEZ, FORMER CONSERVATIVE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE AND HEAD OF ONE OF THE PARTY'S FACTIONS, ON MARCH 12 PROPOSED BELISARIO BETANCUR,

ANOTHER FORMER CANDIDATE, AS THE 1978 PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE OF A UNITED CONSERVATIVE PARTY. TWO DAYS LATER BETANCUR DECLINED THE HONOR, AS HE HAS ON NUMEROUS OTHER PUBLIC AND PRIVATE OCCASIONS. NEVERTHELESS, NO ONE QUITE BELIEVES THESE PROTESTATIONS, PERHAPS BECAUSE BETANCUR IS WIDELY CONSIDERED AN IDEAL CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATE, ONE WHO COULD UNITE THE WARRING FACTIONS LED BY GOMEZ AND EX-PRESIDENT PASTRANA, AND WHO WOULD ALSO BE THE STRONGEST CANDIDATE THE CONSERVATIVES COULD FIELD. BETANCUR'S LATEST REJECTION WAS VIRTUALLY OBLIGATORY, AS HIS ACCEPTANCE OF GOMEZ' PROPOSAL COULD HAVE JEOPARDIZED HIS CHANCES FOR SUPPORT BY THE PASTRANA WING. ALSO, WITH NO OTHER VIABLE CONSERVATIVE CANDIDATES ON THE HORIZON, BETANCUR MAY WELL FEEL NO PRESSING NEED TO EMERGE AT THIS TIME. THE LIBERAL PARTY MOVEMENT LED BY EX-PRESIDENT CARLOS LLERAS MADE OFFICIAL HIS CANDIDACY FOR THE PARTY'S NOMINATION, HELPING TO REMOVE SOME LINGERING DOUBTS ABOUT HIS REAL INTEREST IN THE PRESIDENCY AS OPPOSED TO MERELY ORGANIZING A MOVEMENT TO BLOCK THE CANDIDACY OF JULIO CESAR TURBAY, THE FRONT RUNNER FOR THE LIBERAL NOMINATION. LLERAS' FORMAL ANNOUNCEMENT COULD WELL IMPROVE TURBAY'S CHANCES SINCE IT MAKES LESS LIKELY THE EVENTUAL FORMATION OF AN OFT DISCUSSED BROADER ANTI-TURBAY MOVEMENT WHICH WOULD INCLUDE LIBERALS WHO, ALTHOUGH ANTI-TURBAY, ARE UNWILLING TO SIGN ON WITH LLERAS.

3. COLOMBIA-COSTA RICA REACH ACCORD ON MARITIME BOUNDARIES. PRESIDENT LOPEZ, CONTINUING HIS ADMINISTRATION'S GOAL OF DEFINING COLOMBIA'S MARITIME BOUNDARIES, SIGNED AN AGREEMENT IN SAN JOSE THIS WEEK DELIMITING THOSE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN COSTA RICA AND COLOMBIA (TEXT BEING POUCHED TO ARA/AND). THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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AGREEMENT ALSO PROVIDES FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN THE TWO NATIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT AND PROTECTION OF THE RESOURCES IN THE DESIGNATED AREAS. THE PRESIDENT ANNOUNCED THAT HE WOULD SEEK SIMILAR TREATIES WITH NICARAGUA AND JAMAICA BEFORE THE END OF THIS YEAR. HE REPORTEDLY STATED THAT NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN COLOMBIA AND VENEZUELA ON THEIR RIGHTS IN THE GULF OF VENEZUELA WERE "AT AN ADVANCED STAGE".

4. POSITION OF MINISTER DELEGATE REPLACES THAT OF "DESIGNADO". IN ACCORDANCE WITH A RECENT CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE, FOREIGN MINISTER LIEVANO ASSUMED THE POSITION OF MINISTER DELEGATE, A POSITION WHICH REPLACES THAT OF PRESIDENT DESIGNATE, DURING PRESIDENT LOPEZ' JOURNEY THIS WEEK TO COSTA RICA (SEE ABOVE). THIS NEW POSITION ALLOWS THE MINISTER DELEGATE TO PERFORM LIMITED PRESIDENTIAL FUNCTIONS WITHOUT ACTUALLY ASSUMING THE PRESIDENCY, AND ABOLISHES THE ANOMALY OF HAVING TWO INDIVIDUALS WITH FULL PRESIDENTIAL POWERS IN OFFICE AT THE SAME TIME.

5. CODEL DISCUSSES TRADE. CONGRESSMAN CHARLES VANIK, CHAIRMAN OF THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON TRADE AND WAYS AND MEANS, AND CONGRESSMAN GUY VANDER JAGT, MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE, CALLED ON THE MINISTERS OF FOREIGN RELATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT. THE MANAGER OF THE COLOMBIAN COFFEE FEDERATION AND TECHNICAL LEVEL PEOPLE IN THE TRADE FIELD IN A BUSY ONE-DAY VISIT TO BOGOTA MARCH 15. THE CONGRESSMEN EXPRESSED CONCERN ABOUT HIGH COFFEE PRICES AND STRESSED THE COMMITTEE'S AND THE NEW ADMINISTRATION'S COMMITMENT TO EXPANDED TWO-WAY TRADE AND IMPROVED LATIN AMERICAN RELATIONS. THE COLOMBIANS RAISED TRADE ISSUES SUCH AS TEXTILES, FLOWERS AND SHOES AND URGED THE UNITED STATES TO TAKE A LEADERSHIP ROLE IN TRADE LIBERALIZATION. THE MEETINGS WERE FRIENDLY AND, WE BELIEVE, USEFUL.

6. COLOMBIANS REACT TO ITC CUT FLOWER INVESTIGATION. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE HAS CALLED FOR A SERIES OF VOLUNTARY RESTRAINTS ON COLOMBIAN FLOWER EXPORTS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TO THE U.S. AND EUROPE. CITING THE CASE CURRENTLY BEFORE THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE COMMISSION (ITC), THE MINISTER RECOMMENDED THAT EXPORT FINANCING FOR FLOWERS BE TEMPORARILY SUSPENDED, THAT EFFORTS BE MADE TO OPEN NON-TRADITIONAL MARKETS AND THAT THE GROWERS AGREE ON EXPORT LEVELS TO THE U.S. WHICH WOULD BE IN LINE WITH U.S. MARKET CAPACITY.

7. IMPORTS TO RELIEVE INFLATION THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED THAT A MAJOR EFFORT TO IMPORT FOOD STUFFS WILL BE UNDERTAKEN BY BOTH PRIVATE AND OFFICIAL ENTITIES TO HELP RELIEVE THE EFFECTS OF THE DROUGHT AND TO PUT DOWNWARD PRESSURE ON PRICES. THE POLICY MAY LEAD TO, AMONG OTHER THINGS, IMPORTATIONS OF SOME 20 THOUSAND TONS OF SUGAR FROM CUBA. AT THIS POINT A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN IMPORTS IS PROBABLY THE MOST EFFECTIVE MEANS AVAILABLE TO THE GOVERNMENT TO MAKE SOME IMPACT ON THE PRESENT HIGH RATE OF INFLATION.

8. ANTI-TERRORISM CAMPAIGN HAS LIMITED SUCCESS. THE SEPTEMBER 1975 ASSASSINATION OF ARMED FORCES INSPECTOR GENERAL RINCON QUINONES AND THE KIDNAPPING OF CAMILA SARMIENTO IN THE SAME YEAR WERE CLARIFIED THIS WEEK BY THE REPORTED CONFESSIONS OF FIVE MEMBERS OF THE EXTREME LEFTIST ARMY OF NATIONAL LIBERATION (ELN). DANIEL NAVARRO, URBAN CHIEF OF THE ELN, WHO WAS CAPTURED IN FEBRUARY 1977 ALONG WITH FOUR OTHER ELN MEMBERS, ADMITTED INVOLVEMENT IN THESE CRIMES AND IN THE ATTEMPTED ASSASSINATION OF ALVARO VALENCIA TOVAR IN 1972 AND OF A COLONEL IN BARRANQUILLA IN 1975. AS EVIDENCE THAT POLITICAL VIOLENCE MAY NOT BE SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCED BY THE CAPTURE OF THIS ELN CELL, THE PRESS REPORTED THREE KIDNAPPINGS DURING THE WEEK. THE UNIDENTIFIED KIDNAPERS OF ONE OF THE VICTIMS, THE ITALIAN CITIZEN MANAGER OF A EUROPEAN BANK IN BOGOTA,

HAVE DEMANDED A RANSOM WHICH EXCEEDS THE TOTAL CAPITALIZATION
OF THE BANK. MEANWHILE, IN CARTAGENA, A CIVILIAN COURT

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L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 EB-08 COME-00 STR-04 ITC-01 AGRE-00
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P R 182030Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
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INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS
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E/O. 11652: N/A
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FORMALLY RELEASED THE THREE COLOMBIAN PRIESTS AND THE
AUSTRIAN NUN FROM CHARGES STEMMING FROM THEIR ARREST LAST
NOVEMBER FOR ALLEGEDLY SUPPORTING TERRORISTS ON THE
NORTH COAST. THE THREE HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN TURNED OVER TO
CHURCH OFFICIALS (BOGOTA 1850). THE ARMY REQUESTED AN
INVESTIGATION OF THE COURT'S DECISION.

9. VENDETTA AMONG NARCOTICS TRAFFICKERS. GANG WARFARE
BETWEEN RIVAL NARCOTICS ORGANIZATIONS HAS CLAIMED A NUMBER OF
LIVES IN RECENT MONTHS, WITH SEVERAL MURDERS THIS PAST WEEK
CAPTURING LOCAL HEADLINES/ THE LATEST SUCH CRIMES OCCURRED
MARCH 17, WHEN THE PARENTS OF AN EARLIER KIDNAP VICTIM,
WERE VICTIMS OF A BOMB ATTACK IN WHICH THE
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STEPMOTHER WAS KILLED. ON THE SAME NIGHT TWO OTHER SUSPECTED GANG MEMBERS WERE SHOT. LOCAL PRESS REPORTS ARE BEGINNING TO COMPARE THE PRESENT GANG WAREFARE TO THAT OF CHICAGO AND NEW YORK IN THE 1930'S.

10. PIRATES MENACE WEST COAST SHIPPING. INCREASED INCIDENTS OF PIRACY HAVE BEEN REPORTED IN AND AROUND THE PORT OF BUENAVENTURA DURING THE PAST FEW MONTHS, WITH A NUMBER OF VESSELS OF VARYING SIZES HAVING EITHER BEEN BOARDED OR CHASED BY PIRATES. IN SOME INSTANCES MERCHANDISE HAS BEEN OFF-LOADED AND PASSENGERS HAVE BEEN ROBBED. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THE PIRATES' PRINCIPAL TARGETS HAVE BEEN COFFEE SHIPMENTS AND MIXED CARGOS, USUALLY COMING FROM JAPAN, WHICH HAVE A READY BLACK MARKET VALUE. A SIMILAR INCIDENT, REPORTED IN STATE A-1121, WOULD APPEAR TO BE SOMEWHAT MORE COMMON THAN PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT, AND PIRACY MAY BE A GROWING PROBLEM IN COLOMBIA'S ONLY PACIFIC COAST PORT.
SANCHEZ

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